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Interview with Long Yang

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Long Yang

18 February, 2005

Interviewer: Peter Vang

Translator/Transcriber: Mai Vang

Editor: Paul Hillmer

NOTE: One paragraph (in italics) is still being checked for accuracy.

Before we start here, can you please tell us your name, your mother and father's names, and what village you lived in? What village did you grow up in?

My name is Long Yang. My father is Tong Xeng and my mother is Sau. I was born in the village of *Tha Thom, then we moved to two other villages before we ended up living in the forest because of the war. We stayed there for a little while and then came to live in *Khang Khay, lived for 15 days in Khang Khay, and then came to live in *Padong. We lived a month in Padong, but then the Vietnamese started shooting at Padong. Then we spread out to live in *Phou Khoun. When we reached Phou Khoun, I then was only a young teenaged boy, and I went to—they called them the Green Beret. They were soldiers.

Special Forces?

Special Forces. They came and I went to work for them. I gave them water and washed their clothes. I became the first Hmong who got to speak and learn English.

Before the war, in the village where your mother and father gave birth to you, what work did your parents do?

When we lived in *Tha Thom, my dad was a *naihmba.

Naihmba translated in English is what?

Naihmba translated in English is ...a ..

The village chief?

No, the naihmba is the one who watches a certain village—like a township or a neighborhood, but they called it a village.

OK, OK so tell us, when you first met Americans, the Green Berets, what kind of people did you think they were, and did you think they were different from you?

Oh, when we first saw them, they kind of looked French. And we thought they were French but then they said they were Americans and not French.

Did they teach English to you or did you just learn from them by talking to them and carrying water for them? Or did you also learn writing from them?

I learned words only; they didn't teach reading or writing. They only taught words to me. At that time we were little kids and they'd say, 'Go Go,' then you thought, 'go.' They told me to work for them from about year 1961 to 1962; then some of those Green Berets came back.

When you worked for the Green Berets, how old were you?

Since it was year 1961, guess I was 19 years old.

Let us know, when you were done working for the Green Berets, what did you do?
When the Green Berets came, there was *Tom Ber, the bald head, and Tony, who is now still in Thailand. They were in the CIA and so I went to wash clothes for them. And I was with the Thai's special forces, which they called PARU.

P-A-R-U?

Yes, PARU.

The two American men—what were their names?

One was called Burr

B-U-R-R?

Yes, that was only his code name; he died in San Diego in '84 or '83, and I went to live with him. The Thai came to tend the Green Berets, then I went to work for the Thai washing clothes. They took me to wash clothes for those three.

In your opinion, between the Thai and the Americans, which ones were nicer, in paying money and helping you?

At that time I only received a little amount of money. For one month they gave me three hundred Laotian monetary units. One US dollar equals about 80 Laotian monetary units.

Then three hundred money—could it buy you much to eat?

Over there, three hundred does have some worth.

After you were done washing clothes for the Thais and the Americans, what other jobs did you take?

After that they moved to Long Cheng and came to build an airport in Long Cheng . They brought me to come live in Long Cheng and I worked for a while. Then, in year [19]63, the fifth month, they opened up a place to teach telegraphy. Then the captain said that I should go and learn telegraphy. I was among the first group that learned the telegraph in Long Cheng.

Tell us, was it hard typing the Morse Codes? And how many months did it take for you to finish?

Usually it takes only three months, but with us, they had to teach us seven months before we finished, because in Laos, they taught hard and at the time you were taught other things. During the time we had to learn parachuting and shooting guns, too. It was February of [19]64 when we finished.

Tell us, in those seven months, what did you learn first? And when you were done did they award you the rank of lieutenant at that time, or when?

When we first started we learned the rules of soldier. They called this physical training. Then, two weeks after we started learning the codes. Then after that every day we practiced by listening and writing for three months; then we learned to type.

Did your head hurt at that time?

Oh, it was very hard, because everything you learn goes right to the brain. You're not allowed to hold paper so they make you remember all of the codes.

Were there some boys who came to learn but failed?

Of the ones who came to learn, there were none who couldn't make it. You have to make it, because they make it so you have to learn it. The ones who can't get it well, when we come out, are placed in back so the ones who can do well are sent with the soldiers ahead. After we were done, they gave me the rank of Sergeant, and then I went to live in the forest.

At that time, for a Sergeant, how much did they pay you?

After that, they paid 3000 for one month.

So when you washed clothes you received 300, but when you were done you received 3,000.

Three thousand, and the soldiers, all the Special Forces, were paid at the same time they started paying the ones who learned Morse Code, and they also started giving ranks to everyone. Before the year [19]64, everyone in the Special Forces had no rank, but after [19]64 ranks were given out. Many people I knew were given the rank of Second Lieutenant.

When you went to work in the forest as a radio operator, did you have to fight? Or were you only the operator in the back and letting them fight in front? What did you do?

In year [19]64, when we [first] went, we stayed in the back. The fighters went a good ways ahead and we stayed with the commander, the one who watched one battalion. Since there weren't a lot of us, they only gave one radio operator to each battalion.

One battalion has how many soldiers?

One battalion has 300 soldiers in it.

Can you give us an example of when there was a battle and your commander told you to type codes to call for weapons or planes to come help? Do you have an example of when the soldiers were surrounded and it was you who helped save them?

When they fought, we typed codes back letting them know that we were fighting. When we said 'We are fighting,' they gave us a chart and we looked at the codes in the chart. It has a row going from the left to right and a column coming down. The row had the cities, they did ABC and 123, and you looked at where the letters fit and you told them that at that particular time we, the group of soldiers in the mountain number this, were being attacked. When we started, there were no airplanes to help, only fighters on the ground, but then, afterwards, there were airplanes. When there are airplanes available then the radio operators only radioed in to let them know, and they used what they called *FAGC* (Force Air to Ground Control) for air control. When called, the airplane came immediately. When it got close they communicated among themselves, asking where you were fighting. Sometimes they sent a flare. This flare made a red light falling down, and when it fell you told them whether or not it was accurate, and then if it was, they dropped their bombs and shot their guns.

Were you afraid that the Vietnamese would hear your Morse Code since they had their own Vietnamese radio operators? What do you do to block them from hearing your messages?

In radio Morse Code, there are codes in which you have to change the alphabet into the numbers.

So you had encrypted it?

Yes, for example the *A* is written as "01", or "02, 03". That way it is unknown. One line has about four letters in it, but you have to hide your papers.

So, in one day, how many times did you change the codes so the Vietnamese couldn't intercept it?

When we were done figuring the letters, we had to get a book, and there were only two books. One was held by the operator in the forest, and the other was held by the one back here. We had to use this book in order to radio the letters back, and when it reached back here, they had to use their book to see what the radio meant, and then they could translate it to words.

For one who is very good at codes, how many minutes do you assume he takes to finish one report? And the amateurs take how long?

A radio operator should translate the report in five minutes, because if it is more than that, it won't be good. It has to be five minutes. After finishing the codes, we sent it back and when they received it, they had to translate it in five minutes. When they were done, they called to the leaders that there was a fight here or 'they are hungry and they need food.' Then they sent airplanes to drop food or drop bullets and guns.

Do you have a good example of when you, as a radio operator, helped the soldiers?

Oh, it's been a long time. I've helped a lot because as a radio operator, you are respected and needed as much as the commander. If they order something and you type it down, within about 30 minutes help comes.

Do you have a memory that made you very proud because you helped Hmong soldiers as well as your commander?

In the forest, you don't feel happy. You live one day to the next, wondering what day they will attack and kill you, and wait for the day when you can go back home. When you are most happy is when they send someone to replace you and say, 'At this time, you go back home.' That is when you are happiest, but in the forest, no one is happy.

How long did you stay in the forest? How many months and days before you could come back and rest?

Some go and like it, so they stay for many years, but in the regulations, one radio operator can stay for three or four months, then they have to rotate.

When you get to come back [home], what do you buy with the money you are paid?

Your money?

The money you receive.

When you are with the soldiers, you eat with them. Whatever they eat you eat, but when you come back, you have to get your own food to eat. You use the money to buy vegetables and rice or personal things. But in the forest you have no place to spend it, so wherever the soldiers go, you eat what they eat.

Were you ever injured in battle? Have you used a gun to fight?

One time, when I went to stay with some Hmong, and came back, the Thai captain wanted me to go be a radio operator for the Thai, so I went with the Thai. This was the first heavy attack I was a part of. It was year [19]64—or I can't remember well, year [19]65, maybe. We went to *Bouam Loung and we were setting up 75mm guns for them. We just started for about three weeks and finished setting and trying the guns when the Viet Cong set up their big guns and shot us.

Their guns were what kind? 122s?

Their guns were 122s. There were four of us, two Thai captains who came with me, another Thai and me. One team of PARU traveled four to a group.

So you were one of the PARU?

One of the PARU.

Was the village Hmong or Thai?

We went to stay with *thu Pao*, with *nya po thu Pao*, to teach his soldiers how to shoot big guns.

The 75mms are the ones where you open the back and stick in the bullets?

Yes, the 75 mm, you shoot just like the 105, you open the back then stick the bullet in, but the bullet is smaller. They then shot at us; the first fell far [from us], but not the second. I ran to an uncovered pit and was afraid because it was right under the big gun. Because the following bullets might hit close, I ran to a covered pit and they shot at us for about one hour. In that village, the smoke so thick that it filled the whole village. It was dark and cloudy. When we came out, we found that the two Thai were badly wounded. We carried them to the pit I hid in, and we watched them the whole night until morning. One died and one they carried halfway back before he died. I didn't get hurt but it is Heaven that helps you to not get hurt. (125 min)

As a soldier, did you ever bring something with you, like a lucky charm, so that you wouldn't get hurt? Did you have soldiers who brought charms, because they were afraid of death, so that it would help protect them?

Most of them carried those, but I didn't. I believe that if it is your day to go, then you go, if it isn't your day, then nothing will happen to you.

Give us an example of what other soldiers carried with them to protect themselves.

Some carried idols. Buddhists, they made small idols and wore them on their necks. Some went and bought the *bore's teeth*. They bought those and wore them on their chests. Some went and found stones and asked the monks to bless the stones, then they carried those stones. It depended on what each liked.

The Thai and the Americans, did you see if they carried anything with them?

The Americans didn't, but the Thais wore a lot! They had gold necklaces and idols tied all the way from the top to the bottom.

Is there anything else you want to tell us about being a radio operator?

After being a radio operator, I went to be a spy—intelligence. One group only consisted of three people: one intelligence officer and two others.

The intelligence officer is the one who watches the other two?

No, there is one intelligence officer and you, you are only one of the other two. We went to watch the cave which was the hiding place for two men a long time ago.

The Red Lao?

Yes, the Red Lao. They sent us to land at *Sam Thong and we walked all the way to the cave. We went for two days and two nights, and when we got there, bad fortune, they attacked the village *Nha Khang. The Vietnamese came and surrounded us so that we couldn't stay.

The Vietnamese knew that you were there? They knew that there were some people who came to hide there?

The people scattered out and they came to find where people were.

The cave that you stayed in—were there still Red Lao in it, or had they left a long time before?

That cave was intentionally made for the Laotian governor. When we went, in the day time airplanes shot and the cave had no people in and there was nothing turned on. But at night when airplanes stopped shooting and returned home, we saw a lot of cars enter and exit from there to carry war supplies.

Then the cave must have been very big if it could fit cars in it.

Yes, it's very big. Right now that place is opened as a tourist site for people to go see.

At that time, did you ever call airplanes to come and attack the cave at night?

We only observed, we only reported how many cars came in and how many cars left, and whether they came out carrying supplies or soldiers. I stayed there for one month and fifteen days, then that site exploded. The Vietnamese started searching so then I flew back to Long Cheng. When I reached Long Cheng, they sent me to tape Vietnamese words because since the Vietnamese were going to attack Nha Khang, they were speaking Vietnamese, so then I taped it and they it took to translate to see what the Vietnamese said. Because at that time they used only the walkie-talkies. I went to tape words for one week then after that I came out to learn to fix the walkie-talkies in Thailand for ten months in the year of [19]66-67. We then went back to Laos; then I went to be a teacher of Morse Code. I taught until year [19]69; then the Vietnamese attacked Long Cheng, so we didn't have Morse Code teaching anymore. From then on the Vietnamese attacked Long Cheng a lot. When they first attacked Long Cheng, at that time I was made First Lieutenant. The Second Lieutenants were the ones to watch the people, the security guards, in case there were people coming. Those officers were on watch for two hours each, and the ones who stayed far [back] to see if people were coming, each one stayed [on watch] one hour. Then the next day, when they were about to attack Long Cheng heavily, the Vietnamese shot the first round into the mountains. During the second round my friend woke me up saying, 'wake up, wake up, it's your time, 5 o'clock'; I was to watch from 5 o'clock to 7 o'clock. Right when I woke up, they shot and the second time it hit the bag I was carrying on my back, because I used it as a pillow. They used the guns they shoot from their shoulders, the RPGs. We were in a building with a basement, so I fell right into the basement. It wasn't long before two airplanes dropped cluster bombs on us.

The CBU?

—the CBU on us. Then many people got hurt.

They shot at and hit you?

They dropped it right on top of us.

The Vietnamese were already right there?

Yes, the Americans were located in CIA's headquarters. They ordered then to shoot, and then they used the guns that shoot fire. He shot, it flamed, to direct them to shoot over there but the pilot understood wrongly, so as soon as the gun fired, they dropped the cluster bombs and hit us. Very powerful. It was morning and I must have had good fortune because I came to the room and was about to leave when I noticed there was a cluster bomb right there.

It hadn't exploded?

It hadn't exploded yet. My friend said, 'Long Yang, there's a CBU right there!' Then I dropped right into the ditch, and it exploded right at that moment. Those, they delay. Then if you go close and your body heat activates it, it explodes. At that time so many of our people got hurt. There were about 200 people injured.

Soldiers only?

Civilians too, because at that time there were many civilians in Long Cheng. Then, from that time on, Long Cheng was in battle and it lasted until we ran out of the country. Year [19]71, they attacked Long Cheng a lot. I then went to stay with Soua Yaj. (179 min)

Who is Soua Yaj?

Soua Yaj now lives in France.

Was he a commander?

He was a commander. At that time Soua Yaj was what they called a staff commander. Then I came to live there and one day I was fixing radios and the Vietnamese shot rockets. These rockets were the ones they shot from planes. I was sitting there, and this house had screens all around it. It was hot, so I sat like this [legs stretched out]. Bam! It hit right in front of me, blowing me back into the basement. They came to check and asked, 'are you hit anywhere?' I didn't get hit anywhere. They came closer and saw that there were many holes and said, 'you should be dead, why are you still alive?' They checked me to see if I had lucky charms, but I said 'I don't have any; it's not yet my day to die.' In Laos, there were three bombs that should have killed me. In *Bouam Loung, they came and lied to my dad, saying they saw my body being carried away and the holes in my flesh were this big. So when I got to Thailand, my dad was crying. I asked, 'why are you crying?' He said, 'Oh son, they said you were hurt very badly. They took you to Thailand and you were OK.' So he was happy. The second time was when they dropped those cluster bombs. My bag was all burned, so I put it at my bed; then after everyone left my older brother came to see the bag burning and he cried. Then I came and he was crying, petting the bag, I said, 'Why are you crying?' He said, 'Your bag was all burned, I worried about you, too/' The third time was when the Vietnamese attacked Long Cheng a lot, and my wife was in *Phou Khoun. There was a soldier who died who had the same name as me. They told her it was her husband that died and brought the body to the airport. Her body was numb, but she opened the body bag and saw that it wasn't me, so she was happy. After that, Big Boss came and ordered me to take three people...

Big Boss—you mean General Vang Pao?

General Vang Pao. ...to go fix radios in Vang Vieng. I then went to fix radios over there for two weeks. There weren't many radios, so he asked me to bring three more people; we had six in all. After one month, he came, he told the children that we had some team they called "top secret" in Thailand. In the morning when it was still dark, they woke up at 5 o'clock and flew an airplane to Long Cheng, to record words. Then at night, 9 o'clock, the plane had to come back and land. Then the children didn't work, so year 71, he sent me to stay in Thailand to watch the children

till year 74. If you watch the children, then you have to fly, once a week for experience, to see how it is. After that we came to set up the teams that recorded words underground. I woke up early in the morning, my job was to wake up early, for the first plane to fly to Long Cheng. I had to carry recordings of intercepted messages. Then the plane that flew from Long Cheng back to Thailand had to wait for me to carry those back to Long Cheng, for them to translate.

What kind of plane did you ride on?

Whatever kind of plane was going to Long Cheng. Most of the time, the usual one is the *ongthu*. Not only that, there's one that comes to carry the words [transcriptions], and sometimes it comes late so I ride the *bolum* back with them.

Since Long Cheng was surrounded, when you were flying back and forth, do they shoot at you?

Oh, they shot a lot. We couldn't land. [He blew his nose]. Sorry, runny nose. We fly, land one, they shoot, (pong pong) then we fly away fast. Landing was hard.

When Long Cheng scattered, what did you do to get to Thailand?

Close to year [19]74, I got out of the army. I opened a gas station to sell gas and became the first person to sell gas.

Gas for cars?

I sold gas for cars.

In Long Cheng?

Yes. Then Jerry sent Yaj Lue and Yaj Chee to come tell me to go see him. When I got there, they were talking. General [Vang Pao] and the reat were talking about how we were going to run. They said that I should come too. The names submitted to America were 92 families. Then they added us 6 families, the ones who worked for the Americans were 90 families. They said they'd get planes to bring us. Then I told Jerry that I didn't want to come, I had many relatives. He said, 'You are in more danger than those here, because you are the one who carried the recordings to Long Cheng and back. You are wanted.'

So the Vietnamese knew you?

Yes, they knew me because I am a top secret [operative]. Then I asked, 'If I go, how many can I take?' They said, 'Your immediate family.' I said, 'Then my mom, [at that time my father had died] my younger brothers, my sisters, my older brothers, and all my people.' He said, 'No, that's not right. For us Americans, immediate family means only you, your wife and your kids.' Then I came and talked with my mother and grandmother. They said since I had four days, I should come. We went to wait for planes and the people fought for planes. (225 min)

What did you mean four days?

Four days. Americans call it blackmail, because I am a person who's wanted a lot, so if you stay, you will die; if you go then your life is longer. If you stay you get four days, in Laos they say four days is punishment of death. Four is punishment, day is death. But then they don't like to say you have a punishment of death, so they say four days. I couldn't wait for planes so I put five relatives into the plane and I was left. Jerry and the General were about to fly away, but I came back and I told Jerry I couldn't go yet. He told me to take the car that I stole to drive, and in a little while I should drive that car and come to America. He said, 'I will give an American [contact's name] to you. When you get there, you contact the American and he'll get a plane to send you over the ocean.' I said, 'Let it

be.’ Then the General and Jerry climbed into a helicopter and flew to Thailand. Another helicopter landed, then Nhia, Vang Fong, and Vang Neng left on them. Right now they live in France. I then drove the car. When I reached *Na Su, I had an uncle over there whose last name was Moua. He said ‘You’re driving that to go?’ I said, ‘Yes.’ He said, ‘You can’t go in that; leave the car and take a taxi instead.’ It was almost dark then.

That car was an army car?

That car was an American car, so they wrote ‘IT’ on it, meaning international something. Only American soldiers rode a car like that with a yellow sign. I said, ‘Oh, are there taxis available?’ He went to find one. When we got a taxi, I asked the driver ‘from here to Vientiane is how much?’ He wanted 20,000, but even for 20,000 I was willing to go. Then I put all of my stuff in there, but he didn’t want to come, so he went to find a truck. We went during the night from *Na Sue and reached a mountain. There they checked so we put my stuff all the way at very end. *When the Vietnamese came to check, they only saw everybody wearing Laos the same*, because the Laotians were put at the back of the truck. We headed to Vientiane then I reached a building and asked for my friend and they said he went to Thailand and would be back in about three days. I had some Thai friends who came to work for the General in Long Cheng. I said, ‘Ah, I’ll go meet Mister Thai there to see what he’ll say.’ I headed to his place but they told me the owner wasn’t there, only a supervisor. Then he said to me, ‘Mister Fat, where are you going?’ At that time I was round too, but not as much as now. I said, ‘I’m running, I’m going to Thailand.’ He said, ‘Where’s your family?’ I said, ‘Sleeping over there.’ I came to check on a hotel for them then I tried to find a path we could take to run. Then I reached the General’s house and he and Nhia Yeng said to me, ‘Oh, you can’t come here. Someone called and said that in a little while they will come search General’s house.’ He took me back on his motorcycle and called a taxi that he knew personally to take me. I crossed to the edge of *Nam Phong. One officer wouldn’t let me pass. I looked and saw that there was nothing to do. Well, he allowed me to pass, but I carried some silver and he wanted my money. I said, ‘Oh, this is hard! What should I do?’ He said, ‘You can go. You can go but leave these here. In a while when you come back, you can come take them.’ I said, ‘No, I’m taking these with me.’ He said, ‘You wait a little, when the *colondia* comes, then you can ask him to see if he’ll let you, then you can go.’ I asked, ‘What time?’ He said, ‘Five o’clock he’ll reach here.’ Then he climbed up to the house. The one who was talking to me was only the captain. I then took out 20,000 money *kiep and bought a very big bottle of beer, took it and set it on table for him. ‘This bottle of beer is for you,’ I said. Then I took out 20,000 of money and gave it to him, so he let me cross. We crossed and reached Thailand. Then some Thais caught me too, and wanted 300 *ba* too.

At that time were your wife and children with you too?

They were all with me.

And you got a plane to send your mom and ...?

No, they couldn’t come. They were still in Laos. Only I came. We traveled to many places, ending up meeting up and traveling with General Vang Pao to *Nam Phong. *At night time I went with the General to *Nam Pong to make names* then Jerry came and told us, ‘You folks really would be going to America, but there’s still 125,000 Vietnamese right now in Arkansas, in Kansas City, and in Texas and we have to settle that first.’ Then they started to interview us. After that we waited until the General came, then we went to buy the land in Vinai. The Americans bought it for us, but now, the Thais say they never sold it but only rented it to us.

Do you know how many thousands the Americans bought it for?

I don't know, but they said they bought the land over there for us. Then they took us to live there; then my name showed up among the ones who could come to America, on the 12th month in the year [19]75. But at that time, we were moving, so they put me on delay until we were done. Then in the third month I started to come to America.

When you reached America, where did you land?

We were the fastest group coming from Thailand to America. We started out at Vinai on day seven, then on day nine we had to fly. Before we flew something happened. I brought my little sister with me and was doing our papers while she went to visit grandma and grandpa. On their way over, the car fell into a ditch and she got hurt. I then asked for papers to go check on them, but when we got back they said, 'Your family can't go to America.' I asked, 'For what reason?' They said, 'Because of your little sister.' I went back to the hospital, then I asked the Thai doctor and he said that they wouldn't let us go because two tendons in her foot were torn. Then I said, 'Two tendons only? America has plenty of good medicine. Send my papers, and let us go. When we reach America we will fix it there.' There were two American doctors there, too. He pointed to me and said, 'Go meet with the two Americans.' If I couldn't speak English we probably wouldn't have been able to come. I asked them, 'What is wrong?' One of the doctors took out the x-rays. My little sister went to take pictures and I guess the glass wasn't good. There was a little black spot and they said, 'This, we assume is where the tear is.' Then I said, 'Maybe there's none. Take the picture again.' I forced them, so he took x-rays again and everything looked clear. I got my little sister back. The family already took the bus to the airport, so we took a taxi. We came to Indiana in America, but we first landed in New York, and stayed there for six hours, then we came to Indiana. We lived in Indiana for nine years.

When you landed in America, and saw the technologies, what did you think?

Oh, when we came, we reached New York and it was snowing. We couldn't see anything because it was snowing most of the way from New York to Indiana. The snow was up to our knees. (295 min)

What did you think at that time?

I didn't know what to think.

You rode on buses in New York?

We rode on a plane. We came on a small plane from there. The next morning we woke up and the land was all white. I missed my younger brothers, older brothers, mother, and father a lot.

At that time, who did you stay with in Indiana? A sponsor?

A sponsor. A church called St. James Lutheran Church picked up my family. We lived there and started building our lives. Then Jerry came and Jerry said that the Hmong over there that will get to come are only you guys. You should write to Kennedy so that they'll allow the rest of the Hmong over there to come. We were the ones they brought to show how Hmong looked like and if we were lazy or not. But when we came, everyone worked very hard and Americans saw that the Hmong are a hard-working people like the CIA said. Then we stayed in this country and I've helped the Hmong until this day. Working and helping Hmong, too.

Before you came to work at HAMAA [Hmong American Mutual Assistance Association], where else did you work?

When we came to America I worked very hard. I worked 12 hours and I went to school, too. I went to a technical school. I was the first Hmong to earn an AA degree in America. In the year [19]78, I already got my AA. Then I went to work and I went to find work. My AA degree was in electrical technology, but at that time there were no black-haired [Hmong] working for Americans. I went to work for a company that copies colors for the metal they take to make cars. I wanted to still go to school, and they said, 'This is a union; if you want to go to school then you have to work the third shift.' I worked third shift and worked 11 pm to 7 am. Then when there were only two semesters left, they changed my hours to 11 o'clock to 11 o'clock—very hard. After that, I said, since there are only two semesters left I should quit and finish. I stayed in school until May of [19]78 and after finishing I went back to find work. People don't believe that you can work; I went to find some but they don't believe you can work. There was a place that needed workers but when I went, they said, 'Usually, we pay a lot but we don't know you. We'll pay \$4.25 only, do you still want to work?' When I worked at metals it was already \$5.50, but I thought, 'even though it's not a lot, I'll still work.' I worked hard and well. I took their old supplies that no one had touched for a while and did them all.

How long did you stay?

I stayed until [19]79. My boss quit and he took me to create some new product. The new product was miniature filters for satellites.

Miniature filter?

Yes, miniature filters are very small. When I mastered those he made me a Classified One engineer.

This was still in Indiana?

I worked that until 1985. They had one place doing the same as us, but they wanted better so they hired me out there to work all the way in Washington DC. Then I went to work for four years, they sold it, then I went to work in Pennsylvania. I went there, then they moved a place which came from Massachusetts but had no lead engineer, so they hired me to be the chief engineer. I worked there from [19]88 until [19]93, then they took it and sold it. I had a one year contract, so after the one year, after they'd learned, I came and started my own place called L Technology. Just when it was starting to be successful, I started having health problems. The doctor wouldn't let me do it anymore, and said if I did that it would be too stressful. I had to either I give up my job or give up my life. So I chose to give up my job and sold my place to Leng Chee Lao. Then after that I helped Kou Vang for about eight months and his place started growing, so I left and went back home to Pennsylvania. When my kids were done with school I came here. Pong Sang, a man I've known for a while, said, 'A man like you can not just sleep, you have to come help us.' So I went and helped them. So right now I do 'counseling' for the elders and the people who want to get into business. They come to me for advice. I also do community outreach and right now I'm a teacher for the refugees who just came over.

Do you have anything to say to young Hmong men and women who will be listening to your words about 10 years from now?

I want the young Hmong men and women to work hard in their schooling. Help the Hmong and learn the Hmong language. Learn our traditions and keep them as long as possible. Ask your relatives about the Hmong ways and don't be like some I've seen who don't know anything anymore. I want you all to be interested in us elders so that the Hmong will still have a life in the future. Because we live in America, all the Hmong from other countries rely on us, so we have to work hard and go back and help our people in other countries, for example the ones in Thailand,

Laos, and Vietnam. We have to have one voice, like the Jews, so the world will respect us. When the Jews first came to this country, they were poor, but they thought, 'When we don't have any money, we won't be able to do anything, so the families who are wealthy must help the rest of the Jews.' Israel is a small country but it does control a lot of the money in this world, so they can do what they want. For example, if the Americans have anything against the Jews, they'll say, 'Remember, you do that to us now, so when you need money, don't come and ask us because we won't help you.' The day we Hmong can learn their system, we will be able to do anything we need to do, but if we only remain as we are now and be American servants, then later on in the years our people will be no more. I want the young men and women to continue forward. Another thing is that I want you to research on the Hmong who've come to America. See if they're still alive or if not, then where their relatives are so that everyone's past will be known, and we can see how they've grown in this country according with their children going to school. I want this so that we Hmong will have a history recorded so that one day there will be a place for their names. If you don't research all this then the only person you will know is General Vang Pao. General Vang Pao is our leader but you should know that there are many who have worked under him but worked just as hard, not resting day or night, for the Hmong.

Thank you for taking time to talk to us, and for sharing your wisdom with us.